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**STATEMENT OF SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY ON THE CHILDREN'S  
HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM**

*(As Prepared for Delivery)*

Sometimes, the American people demand that Congress and the Administration enact initiatives to address fundamental national needs. During the Depression, we enacted Social Security to see that seniors could live their later years with dignity. In the 1940's, we opened the doors of education for returning veterans through the G.I. Bill. In the 1960's, we took action to see that seniors had quality health care, and the result was Medicare. In the 1990's, Democrats and Republicans, Congress and the Administration, states and the federal government all worked together to help alleviate the crisis in children's health by enacting CHIP. The success of each of these programs has echoed through the decades in the lives of millions of Americans.

Today, we stand at a crossroads, faced with the choice between a path that will continue and strengthen the promise of good health and a strong start in life that CHIP brings to millions of children – or whether we will turn away from that promise, and curtail the help and the hope that CHIP brings.

Many of the best ideas in public policy are the simplest. The Children's Health Insurance Program is based on one simple and powerful idea – that all children deserve a healthy start in life, and that no parents should have to worry about whether they can afford to take their children to the doctor when they are sick. CHIP can make the difference between a child starting life burdened with disease – or a child who is healthy and ready to learn and grow.

That is why CHIP has always enjoyed bipartisan support. This support goes back to 1996, when Massachusetts enacted a state program that became one of the models for CHIP. The Massachusetts legislature passed a bill to expand coverage for children and paid for it by increasing the tobacco tax in the state. When that program was vetoed by Governor Bill Weld, a majority of the Republicans in the state Senate stood with the Democrats to override the veto.

I was proud to work closely with Senator Hatch to create the national Children's Health Insurance Program. When CHIP went into effect across the country, among its greatest champions were Republican Governors who understood the importance of expanding health insurance for children in their states. Governor Leavitt in Utah and Governor Cellucci in Massachusetts were both champions of CHIP when they were governors.

The question for President Bush today is why he would even consider rejecting a program that has long brought Republicans and Democrats together to help children.

CHIP allows parents to choose insurance for their son or daughter from a private insurance company. That is one reason why Republicans have long supported the CHIP program. Indeed, CHIP uses the same private insurance model that President Bush supported in creating the Medicare prescription drug benefit. If Members of Congress and the Administration really feel strongly that it's wrong for the federal government to support health care coverage, maybe they should start by giving up their own taxpayer-subsidized health care through the federal employees' program. If members can take their children to the attending physician of the Senate with all the benefits that affords—shouldn't all American children have access to quality healthcare too?

President Bush has argued that CHIP costs too much. But I will tell you what costs more: treating children in emergency rooms after their conditions have become severe. CHIP saves money -- and untold suffering -- by getting health care to our nation's children before they are seriously ill.

CHIP is paid for by an increased tax on cigarettes -- not by raiding the treasury. That tax will itself save us countless dollars and lives by discouraging smoking.

The case for CHIP is stronger than ever. Today, six million children are enrolled in the program -- children who otherwise would be without health care.

But another 9 million children in America still have no health insurance at all. And once again, Democrats and Republicans in Congress have come together for the common good.

CHIP's success is impressive. Since CHIP began, the percentage of uninsured for children has gone down even as more and more adults are losing their own insurance coverage, because employers reduce it or drop it entirely.

In the past decade, the percentage of uninsured children has dropped from almost 23 percent in 1997 to 14 percent in 2005. That reduction is significant, but it's obviously far from enough.

Recently, the Census Bureau reported that in the past year 600,000 more children have become uninsured. The struggling economy is causing employers to drop family coverage and even the robust and successful CHIP program hasn't been able to stave off decreasing coverage for children.

CHIP helps to improve children's school performance. When children are receiving the health care they need, they do better academically, emotionally, physically and socially.

And CHIP all but eliminates the distressing racial and ethnic health disparities for the minority children who disproportionately depend on it for their coverage.

That's why organizations representing children, or the health care professionals who serve them, agree that preserving and strengthening CHIP is essential to children's health.

The Bible tells us to "open your hand wide to the poor, and the needy in your land." Congregations across the country act on that command every day, by providing needed help to those with medical needs in their communities. They are turning faith into works – but they know they can't do the job alone. That's why religious leaders from all faiths have called upon Congress and the Administration to assist in this mission by renewing and improving CHIP.

Today, we renew our bipartisan commitment to the job begun by Congress ten years ago, and to make sure that the lifeline of CHIP is strengthened and extended to many more children.

Only the Bush Administration seems content with the inadequate status quo.

First, the President proposed a plan for CHIP doesn't provide what's needed to cover children who are eligible but unenrolled. In fact, the President's proposal is \$8 billion less than what's needed simply to keep children now enrolled in CHIP from losing their current coverage—\$8 billion short.

Then, as Congress was negotiating the CHIP bill, the Administration issued a new guidance that would make it virtually impossible for states to expand coverage to children in their state with household incomes above 250% of the federal poverty level. This would cause 18 states and the District of Columbia to drop children from coverage.

And what is most baffling is that the President has consistently threatened to veto this bill.

This is all a matter of priorities. And we can see what the President's are. The senate bill provides \$35 billion over 5 years for CHIP. Just one year of the president's tax cuts is \$72.6 billion. And we spend \$120 billion on one year in Iraq.

Each day we spend \$333 million on Iraq. That's over 23 times what we currently spend on children needing health care every day. For one day in Iraq, we could cover the healthcare of over 256,000 American children. For one month in Iraq, we could cover the total cost of CHIP for over a year.

The children of America should not become the latest casualties of this Administration.

The CHIP bill before us this week is genuine bipartisan agreement that will help children in communities across the nation. It provides coverage to about 4 million children who would otherwise be uninsured.

This bill moves us forward together, Republicans and Democrats alike, to guarantee the children of America the health care they need and deserve.

Quality health for children isn't just an interesting option or a nice idea. It's not just something we wish we could do. It's an obligation. It's something we have to do. And it's something we can do today. I urge my colleagues to vote for this bill.

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